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ABSTRACT

In order to understand the meaning of wives' labor force participation for dual-earner families and the consequences of that participation, the breadwinner role must be conceptualized more clearly and the concept used more precisely. Researchers must abandon their assumption that all wives who are in the labor force are breadwinners and instead treat the allocation of breadwinning responsibility in dual-earner families as a variable. The breadwinner role should be the subject of research in its own right. Much work is needed before basic questions about the allocation of breadwinning responsibility in dual-earner families can be answered. Questions that need to be answered through carefully designed and conducted research include: (1) the extent of breadwinning responsibility assigned to employed wives; (2) variation among dual-earner couples in how breadwinning responsibility is allocated; (3) factors influencing the extent to which breadwinner role is shared; and (4) the relative importance of various factors and their interaction. This research would greatly enhance understanding of the meaning of labor force participation in married women's lives. (ABL)

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The Breadwinner Role

Social scientists are generally agreed that the nuclear family form which we now regard as "traditional" was largely a product of industrialization (Bernard, 1981; Kanter, 1977; Oakley, 1975; Pleck, 1977; Rodman and Safilios-Rothschild, 1983; Smith and Reid, 1986; Tilly and Scott, 1978; Young and Willmott, 1975). In pre-industrial society, the family was a unit of production in what Tilly and Scott (1978) have labelled "the family economy." The home was the workplace, and family members were the workers. Industrialization brought with it a new, more complex division of labor. Home and workplace were physically separated, and the family was transformed from a unit of economic production into a unit of economic consumption.

The changing economic status of the family created a new division of family labor. As Rodman and Safilios-Rothschild (1983:220) have explained, "Within a family that is not an independent economic unit, someone must 'go' to work for the 'income' to buy the resources needed by the family." Those who could not go to work became economically dependent on those who did. Eventually, the separation of work and home was accompanied by a corresponding separation of family roles in which husbands bore primary responsibility for earning income in the workplace and wives bore primary responsibility for managing consumption in the home (Bernard, 1981; Pleck, 1977; Oakley, 1975; Slocum and Nye, 1976; Young and Willmott, 1975). When the

dust of the industrial revolution settled, two new family roles had been born: the male breadwinner and the female homemaker.

A breadwinner is a person who is considered responsible for the financial support of a family unit. Jessie Bernard (1981) estimates that the role emerged as a male responsibility in the United States in the 1830s and that, from that time until the late 1970s, a <u>good</u> provider (or breadwinner) could be defined as "...a man whose wife did not have to enter the labor force" (Bernard, 1981:2). Smith and Reid (1986:21) note that this definition held even when most men could not attain it:

> Normative behavior -- that is, prescriptive attitudes about what was women's work and what was men's -- was determined by the middle class. Husbands were to be the breadwinners, and wives, full-time mothers and homemakers....
>
> The behavior described here could be engaged in largely by white middle- and upper-middle-class families, but this did not affect the norm, nor did the fact that it was only in the latter part of the nineteenth century that even these women were able to devote much of their lives exclusively to mothering and home-making.... [T]he norm was firmly entrenched regardless of behavior.

The importance attached to these normative prescriptions can be demonstrated by the enormous social concern over unemployed fathers and employed mothers as sources of family disorganization and disruption (Kanter, 1977).

Although breadwinning involves participation in the paid labor force, it is important to understand that the breadwinner role is a family role, not an occupational role. What makes a worker a breadwinner is the fact that that person is responsible for the financial support of a family, and the breadwinner's

responsibilities to the family are fulfilled largely through work outside the home. Thus, in the traditional constellation of specialized family roles, a major part of a man's responsibility as a husband is to provide financial support for his wife and a major part of his responsibility as a father is to provide financial support for his children (Bernard, 1981; Gronseth, 1972; Veroff and Feld, 1970). The breadwinner role is thus both a "boundary role" (Parsons, 1955) which links work and family and part of a system of roles within the family.

Because of the breadwinner's importance in ensuring the economic survival of the family, family life tends to be organized around the requirements of the breadwinner's job. Bailyn (1978) has used the concept of "accommodation" to analyze the intersection of work and family roles. The traditional breadwinner role is relatively nonaccommodating; because the entire family depends upon the breadwinner's income, his work requirements are relatively inflexible and cannot be adjusted to other family needs. Instead, the rest of the family must accommodate to the requirements of the breadwinner's job (Scanzoni, 1978; Yankelovich, 1974). Piotrkowski (1979:281) provides an extreme example of such accommodation in 19th century English laboring families:

> ...[W]omen (and, to a lesser extent, children) ate food of lower nutritional value than did husband-fathers. Since the household depended on their wages and therefore their strength, they were given the best of what was available to the family.

Even in families where there is plenty of nutritious food to go around, however, the wife may still be expected to accommodate; she will be expected to keep the family running smoothly as both a household and an emotional unit so that the husband will not be distracted from his occupational pursuits by family problems. This kind of accommodation may mean that the wife serves as "...the emotional supporter, the listener who makes a comfortable home for the man to come home to after the important daily life is finished" (Veroff and Feld, 1970:25-6). As Howe (1972:21) has put it, the male breadwinner role "...ends up determining the lives of everyone within a family."

Parsons (1955) referred to this accommodation component of the homemaker role as "expressive leadership" and to the male breadwinner role as "instrumental leadership." In the 1950s he was extolling the virtues of this role specialization within the family and confidently predicting that these male and female roles would endure. By the 1970s, however, as increasing numbers of women entered the paid labor force, social scientists were heralding the imminent death of these sex-segregated family roles (Pleck, 1977; Young and Willmott, 1975). Are these specialized roles, in fact, disappearing? What happens to the breadwinner and homemaker roles when both husbands and wives are wage earners? This paper addresses one half of that question by examining the breadwinner role in dual-earner families.

Wives' Labor Force Participation and Breadwinning Responsibility

How does women's labor force participation affect the definition and delegation of family roles? A large body of social science research has developed around this question, most of it focusing on the division of household labor (Berk, 1985; Kimball, 1983; Model, 1982; Pleck, 1983; Pleck, 1985; Young and Willmott, 1975). Much of this literature begins with what Hood (1983) has called "the marketwork/housework bargain": if the traditional breadwinner and homemaker roles are asymmetrical but complementary, then wives' entrance into the paid labor force will upset that complementarity and husbands will have to take on more household labor to restore the balance (Scanzoni, 1970). Young and Willmott (1975:278) predict that this process of adjustment will result in a new family form, a "symmetrical family" in which both marketwork and housework are shared:

> By the next century ... society will have moved from (a) one demanding job for the wife and one for the husband, through (b) two demanding jobs for the wife and one for the husband, to (c) two demanding jobs for the wife and two for the husband.

Researchers are agreed, however, that Young and Willmott's symmetrical family has not yet arrived. The evidence is consistent that husbands do not increase their household labor significantly when their wives take on paid work outside the home. According to Pleck (1985:15),

> Data from large-scale surveys of time use conducted in the 1960s and early 1970s ... indicated that husbands of employed wives did <u>not</u> perform more housework and childcare than did husbands of full-time homemakers.

Berk's analysis of the data led her to the conclusion that,

> ... whereas wives make a significant contribution to market time in response to household need, there is virtually no level of household work demands that prompts a substantial contribution from husbands (Berk, 1985:163)

and Model (1982:193) agrees, noting that "Although women's labor force activity creates substantial overload, husbands are unlikely to relieve the strain."

How can we explain this nonresponsiveness on the part of husbands? One hypothesis is that husbands' level of household activity is more a result of gender role ideology than of the demands of their paid work. As Pleck (1983:273) explains, "According to this hypothesis, men perform little family work because both they themselves and others do not view it as appropriate for them to do so." Model's (1982: 193) finding that "When husbands contribute, they do so with the understanding that they are operating in 'female territory'" provides support for this hypothesis.

This explanation for the persistence of sex-segregated household labor reminds us that roles like "breadwinner" and "homemaker" have a normative component -- that they involve not only what people do, but also the meaning that they attach to what they do. What meaning do wives and their husbands attach to women's participation in the paid labor force? Much of the research that investigates the effect of women's paid work on the family division of labor seems to simply assume that when

wives enter the labor force, they become breadwinners. Pleck (1983: 307), for example, asserts that,

> There are two principal male breadwinning patterns: sole-breadwinning (husband is in the labor force, wife is not) and cobreadwinning (both husband and wife are in the labor force).

Kimball (1983) considers this interpretation of wives' labor force participation so unproblematic that, in her study of egalitarian marriages, she includes chapters on "Housework" and "Child Care," but none on "Breadwinning." Smith and Reid (1986:47) accurately capture the approach of much of the literature when they note that,

> Whether or not and to what extent wives participate in the breadwinning role traditionally assigned to husbands is usually ascertained in a straightforward, objective manner. One can simply look at whether or not the wife has a paid job, the number of hours she works outside the home ..., and the percentage of family income she earns....

But being a "breadwinner" involves more than just working at a paid job; it also involves the <u>obligation</u> to do so in order to contribute to the financial support of the family (Scanzoni, 1978; Potuchek, 1983; Hood, 1986). There is considerable evidence that this is often <u>not</u> the meaning attached to wives' labor force participation, that the obligation to provide is still assigned primarily to men.

Scanzoni (1978:70) has pointed out that "the healthy male has [traditionally] been obligated (both by law and powerful custom) to provide for his family." Reports from men indicate that, even when their wives are employed, they still feel this

obligation (Lein, 1983; Rodman and Safilios-Rothschild, 1983; Smith and Reid, 1986). One respondent in Kimball's study described the sense of obligation this way:

> The roles were so defined that if I had a job and the job terminated, it was necessary for me to be the number one breadwinner. I would have to go out right away and find almost any job. I have taken some really awful and humiliating jobs (Kimball, 1983:43).

Filene (1981:3), commenting on the fact that the men in his study found it much easier to write about their work lives than their personal lives, notes that the obligation to work is a "fact of life" for men and that "a men's liberation movement would not demand the right to work." When men try to "liberate" themselves from the sense that it is their responsibility to provide, they often find that others are unwilling to exempt them from that obligation. One of the role-sharing husbands in Smith and Reid's study, for example, was troubled by the disapproval of his family and friends:

> The major source of his intermittent but gnawing discomfort was their attitude, which he admitted that he shared to some extent, that a man should not let his wife support him but should be the provider for the family (Smith and Reid, 1986:124)

And one of the men in Filene's study felt that such attitudes were shared by his wife:

> Thus although she likes having me help her do housework, and in fact, insists, and although she expects me to share in the child care, she does not expect herself to share equally in the money earning, and she expects me to do more than my equal share in pursuing a career. In fact, she does earn as much money as I do right now, but she does not expect to go on doing so.... When I argue that I want only to work part time, so that I can be flexible in determining what

> hours and days I will spend at home, and thus share in more of the homemaking work, Vera objects, not because she objects to this goal, but because she thinks (correctly) that it will limit my earning power (Kreilkamp, 1981:112-117).

These are not deviant cases or misperceptions. Attitude surveys consistently show that both men and women attribute a greater responsibility for family support to men than to women. In a study conducted in Yakima County, Washington, Slocum and Nye asked respondents how they would act toward a man if he did not do his best to support his family. About three-fourths of both men and women in the sample reported that they would not choose such a man as a close friend, and fewer than 20% checked the response, "It would not make any difference to me" (Slocum and Nye, 1976:82-3). Pleck reports that, in a survey of "162 husbands in a highly educated, midwestern university community,"

> For "families in general," 25 percent felt that the husband should be entirely responsible [for breadwinning]; 39 percent thought that both husband and wife should be responsible, but the husband more (Pleck, 1983:308).

Slocum and Nye (1976) used hypothetical situations to probe for evidence of a normative obligation for <u>women</u> to be providers, but could find support for such a prescription only in the situation of a woman who had no husband to support her. Similar results have been found in studies of college students. Potuchek (1983) found that, in a sample of students at a small liberal arts college, most of the men believed that their future wives should have the right to work if they wanted to, but the overwhelming majority of the women felt that their future

husbands should be obliged to work. Parelius found that, even among a group of college women in which "an overwhelming majority believed that a wife's career is of equal importance to her husband's, that women should be able to compete for any job they wish, that women are as competent as men, and that women should seek out the best jobs they can," fewer than half believed that "both spouses should contribute equally to the financial support of the family" (Parelius, 1975:430). And, finally, even among Linda Haas's carefully selected sample of role-sharing couples, almost one-third reported "some difficulty adjusting to the idea that the wife should be as obligated as the husband to work" (Haas, 1982:750).

The continued expectation that men should be providers can be attributed, at least in part, to the disadvantaged position of women in the labor force (Lein, 1983; Rodman and Safilios-Rothschild, 1983; Smith and Reid, 1986). If the family wage system fought for by labor unions in the early part of the century was a reflection of male responsibility for breadwinning, it also served to perpetuate that responsibility by legitimizing the male/female wage gap (Feldberg, 1984). Because husbands are usually able to earn more than their wives and families are therefore more dependent on the husband's income than on the wife's, both women and men give greater primacy to the husband's employment needs (Bryson and Bryson, 1980). Not surprisingly, then, many husbands and wives interpret the wife's labor force participation as "helping out" rather than as taking

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responsibility for support (Bird, 1979; Hood, 1983), and husbands do not significantly reduce their own commitment to paid work when their wives are employed (Berk, 1985; Moen and Moorehouse, 1983; Young and Willmott, 1975).

It is evident, then, that the concept of "breadwinning" needs to be more clearly defined and more precisely used in research on wives' labor force participation. The study of social roles includes two different dimensions, normative expectations (how one should behave) and behavioral enactment (how one does behave) (Nye, 1976; Nye and Gecas, 1976). Roles can only be enacted by individuals, whose interpretation of them may vary; but, at the same time, normative expectations for roles exist apart from individual performances. Not surprisingly, then, there is often a disjuncture between normative expectations for a role and the behavioral enactment of that role. Thus, a woman may work full time and contribute half the income that her family needs to survive, but she may define the responsibility for family support as belonging to her husband and both she and he may go to great lengths to define her earning as something other than breadwinning (Hood, 1983; Slocum and Nye, 1976). In her study of women factory workers, for example, Ellen Rosen found that, although the women she studied are strongly attached to the labor force, work at these jobs because their families need the money, and earn almost half the family income, they nevertheless define their husbands as the main breadwinners whose income "really supports the family" (Rosen,

1987:103). The reverse may also occur; a couple may define breadwinning as a shared responsibility despite the fact that the wife has temporarily left the labor force in order to provide child care (Smith and Reid, 1986).

Disjunctures between normative expectations and behavioral enactment of a role are particularly likely to occur under conditions of role ambiguity -- when there is a lack of consensus about what the demands of the role are (Veroff and Feld, 1970). Such ambiguity is characteristic of periods of role change, when widespread changes in behavior may precede changes in normative expectations or, conversely, normative changes may precede behavioral change (Bernard, 1976). Role ambiguity is also characteristic of heterogeneous societies in which role definitions may vary among segments of the society. These variations may include differences in what the normative expectations for a role are (how much and what kind of financial responsibility is a breadwinner expected to assume?) and differences in definitions of who should play that role (who is expected to take financial responsibility?) (Nye and Gecas, 1976).

These ambiguities about the expectations of a role and the resulting disjunctures between expectations and enactment are complicated further by the fact that roles always exist as parts of role systems. Thus,

> ... [T]he two sexes' work and family roles can be viewed as comprising a work-family 'role system'.... In this system of interrelated roles, each sex's role

> in one domain (paid work or family) can be understood as articulating with that same sex's role in the other domain (e.g., men's paid work role interacts with men's family role). At the same time, each sex's role in one domain is related to the other sex's role in that same domain (e.g., men's family role interacts with women's family role) (Pleck, 1983:252).

This means that disjunctures and ambiguities can occur not only in the society as a whole, but also within the individual family role system. Such disjunctures within the family role system will lead to conflict and will require negotiated solutions in order for the family to continue to function (Hood, 1983).

In studying the breadwinner role, therefore, it is important to include both normative prescription and behavioral enactment. This paper defines a breadwinner as someone who both participates in the paid labor force (enactment) and who feels responsible for doing so in order to contribute to the financial support of the family (prescription). Under this definition, a husband and wife could be said to share the breadwinner role if both participated to the same degree in the labor force (e.g., both working full-time or both working part-time) and if both felt equally responsible for the financial support of the family. As both Haas's (1982) and Smith and Reid's (1986) studies of egalitarian couples have demonstrated, however, such role sharing is rare. Clearly, dichotomies which divide families into those with a sole breadwinner and those with shared breadwinners are inadequate. We need to distinguish finer gradations in the allocation of breadwinning responsibility.

Several studies of families in which both husband and wife are in the paid labor force have identified such gradations in the allocation of breadwinning responsibility. Smith and Reid's study of role sharers contrasts role sharing marriages (those in which "both partners have equal claims to the breadwinning role and equal responsibilities for the care of home and children") with two other family patterns, the traditional marriage (in which the husband is responsible for earning money and the wife for taking care of home and children -- although each may supplement the other's efforts) and the quasi-traditional marriage (in which both partners work full time, but the wife retains a disproportionate share of child-care and domestic responsibilities) (Smith and Reid, 1986:2-8). Where Smith and Reid's typology is based on the family division of labor, Bird (1979) has used money management to classify the couples in her study of two-paycheck marriages. She has distinguished four basic types: those in which the wife's paycheck is not considered part of the family financial base ("Pin Money Couples"), those in which the wife's paycheck is kept separate and used for special items or projects ("Earmarker Couples"), those in which both paychecks are put into one undifferentiated financial pot ("Pooler Couples"), and those in which each paycheck is considered to belong to the person who earns it and family expenses are scrupulously divided into his and her responsibilities ("Bargainer Couples"). Bird is clearly using money management here as a proxy for allocation of financial responsibility.

Two other studies of dual-earner marriages have addressed the issue of breadwinning responsibility more directly. Jane Hood (1983) has distinguished three patterns of shared breadwinning, each of which takes account of both the family's dependence on the wife's income (the proportion of total family income which she earns) and the husband's and wife's definitions of breadwinning responsibility. Wives in "main/secondary provider" families earn less than 30% of the family income; and, although the wife's income is used to improve the family standard of living, her employment is defined as temporary. In "coprovider" families, by contrast, the wife's employment is defined as permanent, her income is considered necessary for family financial maintenance, and the husband expresses relief at being relieved of the burden of being sole provider. In between these two types, Hood has located "ambivalent coprovider" families; these are families who are clearly dependent on the wife's salary, but who are uncomfortable with that arrangement (their behavior differs from their own normative prescriptions).

Like Hood, Laura Lein (1983) has developed a typology which takes into account both family practice and family ideology. Lein refers to dual-earner families in which both the ideology and practice of family roles is sex-segregated as "Add-to" families --those in which a wife's paid work is "simply added to her other responsibilities for family and home life." These families can be contrasted with "Helping Out" families who share

the ideological preference for a sex-segregated homemaker/ breadwinner pattern of roles, but who acknowledge that, in fact, the wife is making a significant contribution to family finances and, in turn, requires as much help as possible from her husband in maintaining the home. The remaining two family types in Lein's classification scheme do not prefer sex-segregated family roles; they believe, instead, that homemaking and financial responsibilities should be shared. Lein refers to the rare couples who succeed in living according to this belief as "Partners" families. They are vastly outnumbered, however, by "Specialist" families who slip into sex-segregated patterns of responsibility despite their egalitarian beliefs and who explain this division of responsibility as "each person doing what they do best."

Factors Which May Influence the Allocation of Breadwinning

We can see, then, that not all dual-earner couples allocate breadwinning responsibility in the same way, and that variations in how these families interpret the breadwinner role encompass both behavior and normative expectations. What accounts for these variations? What social variables distinguish main/ secondary provider families from coproviders, helping-out families from partners families? The factors that may influence the allocation of breadwinning responsibility can be divided into two broad categories: background characteristics and situational factors. Background characteristics are demographic

and attitudinal attributes that spouses in dual-earner marriages bring with them to their situation. A review of the literature identifies a number of such factors which may influence the meaning attached to wives' labor force participation in these marriages. These characteristics are important because they influence the normative expectations that spouses bring to the marriage, and one of the components of shared breadwinning is a normative expectation that both husband and wife are responsible for family financial support.

John Scanzoni (1978) has argued that the traditional breadwinner/homemaker role system still provides the backdrop for contemporary marriages, that the husband will be expected to assume primary responsibility for financial support and the wife primary responsibility for household labor unless and until these normative expectations are explicitly renegotiated. Smith and Reid found that, even among the role-sharing couples they studied, the pull of traditional expectations was very powerful:

> Since most couples refuse to consider the purchase of full-time infant care arrangements, one partner must give up or reduce outside work commitments. The "logical" partner is the wife. It is expected by employers, relatives, and our social institutions. Maternity (but not paternity) leave is often available (Smith and Reid, 1986:176).

Thus, as Hood (1983) points out, the extent to which breadwinning is shared will depend on how attached the spouses are to their traditional roles and to the power and control which accrue to them through responsibility for their respective traditional domains (Smith and Reid, 1986). In other words,

responsibility for breadwinning can be shared only to the extent that husbands are willing to relinquish that responsibility and wives are willing to assume it (Hood, 1983).

Such changes in normative expectations do not come easily. Although a husband who relinquishes responsibility for breadwinning will gain relief from the stress of that responsibility, he will also experience some losses. To the extent that a man derives much of his identity and self-esteem from his occupational role (Filene, 1981; Pleck, 1985; Rubin, 1983), relinquishing responsibility for breadwinning may require an adjustment of his sense of self. In relinquishing his responsibility for breadwinning, a man also gives up the protection from family distractions which go with that responsibility and may find himself open to new demands from his wife for participation in household labor. Not surprisingly, then, researchers have discovered that many husbands are reluctant to relinquish their breadwinning responsibility. Both Lein (1983) and Hood (1983) found this to be true in their studies of dual-earner families; several of Hood's "ambivalent coproviders" were husbands who insisted that responsibility for earning the family income was theirs despite the fact that their wives were contributing 40%-50% of it and wanted to be considered coproviders. Slocum and Nye (1976) found that the majority of husbands (56%) in their survey wanted to retain responsibility for breadwinning, and that men whose wives were employed often felt inadequate in their performance as providers.

Although women generally express less ambivalence about assuming the breadwinner role than men do about relinquishing it (Nadelson and Nadelson, 1980; Slocum and Nye, 1976), they are not all eager to do so. Why not? Although assuming responsibility for breadwinning raises a woman's status in the family (Hood, 1983) and allows her to make increased demands on her husband with regard to household labor (Hood, 1983; Scanzoni, 1978), his accession to those demands means that she must relinquish both her right to be provided for and her traditional control over household activities. Some research indicates that many wives, even working professionals, do not want to relinquish domestic control, particularly with respect to parenting (Pleck, 1985; Yogev, 1981). And Ferree (1985) has argued that working-class women may be reluctant to give up their right to male financial support because that right gives them some protection from capitalist exploitation in the workplace.

One background characteristic which is likely to have an important influence on husbands' willingness to relinquish breadwinning and wives' willingness to assume it is gender role ideology, a general belief in traditional or egalitarian gender roles. Presumably, those who embrace an ideology of gender equality will be more likely to see sharing of the breadwinner role as a worthwhile goal (Hunt and Hunt, 1982; Pleck, 1985), while those who hold traditional values will try to maintain a single breadwinner lifestyle whenever possible (Hunt and Hunt, 1982; Smith and Reid, 1986). Gender role ideology, in turn, is

likely to be affected by such background factors as education, age and socialization.

Many observers have attributed more egalitarian ideology to the more highly educated segments of the population (Veroff and Feld, 1970; Young and Willmott, 1975); and this impression seems to be borne out in studies of couples who are consciously attempting to change traditional family roles. Both Haas (1982) and Smith and Reid (1986) have found that role sharers are highly educated. Age is often assumed to have a similar effect on gender role ideology. If Young and Willmott (1975) are correct, the younger as well as the more educated will have more egalitarian ideologies. We do know that younger wives are more likely to be employed than are older wives (Hayghe, 1982). Nadelson and Nadelson (1980) note further that, in a study of college students, 70% of the females agreed that breadwinning responsibility should be shared equally. Age and education may influence gender role ideology, at least in part, through their influence on socialization. Laura Lein (1983) maintains that our early experiences of family life exert a strong influence on our conceptions of family roles, and Linda Haas (1982) has found supporting evidence in her study of role-sharing couples. Haas's role sharers came disproportionately from homes in which their mothers had been employed and in which they had been assigned sex-atypical chores as children.

Another background characteristic which may affect the meaning attached to wives' labor force participation is social

class. Some observers begin with the positive relationship between education and egalitarian ideology and conclude that working-class marriages are therefore less egalitarian (Bird, 1979). Young and Willmott's (1975:33) "Principle of Stratified Diffusion," for example, assumes that the evolution toward symmetrical families begins "at the upper end of the class spectrum" and filters downward. On the other hand, the empirical evidence is mixed. Some studies have found that indicators of social class (particularly education) are indeed positively related to egalitarian ideology and practice (Haas, 1982; Hayghe, 1982; Lopata et al., 1980; Slocum and Nye, 1976; Smith and Reid; 1986); but others have found no relationship (Model, 1982), a curvilinear relationship in which lower-middle class marriages were the most egalitarian (Kanter, 1977), or an inverse relationship in which working-class marriages were characterized by more egalitarian practice (Hood, 1983; Model, 1982). Smith and Reid (1986) have suggested that these disparate findings can be explained, in part, by a pattern in which behavioral change follows ideological change in the middle class but precedes it in the working class. Rosanna Hertz (1986) found in her study of high-income dual-career couples, however, that their egalitarian arrangements resulted more from the practical exigencies of the situation in which they found themselves than from any prior ideological commitment to gender equality.

This brings us to the second set of influences on the allocation of breadwinning responsibility, situational factors. The meaning attached to the labor force participation of wives in dual-earner families is affected not only by prior expectations and ideology, but also by the concrete situation in which the family finds itself. Stage in the family life cycle provides a powerful example of such a situational factor. Because mothers are usually seen as having special capabilities and responsibilities for childrearing, women tend to curtail their career involvement when they have pre-school age children (Poloma, et al., 1983; Smith and Reid, 1986), and they are more likely to participate in the labor force when they do not have young children (Moen and Moorehouse, 1983). This is not just a matter of ideology; the effect seems to occur even among couples with a commitment to gender equality. Studies of role-sharing and dual-career couples have shown that the arrival of children makes a role-sharing pattern much harder to maintain (Haas, 1982; Poloma, et al., 1982; Smith and Reid, 1986). It should not surprise us, then, to learn that the presence of preschool age children seems to strengthen a man's attachment to the breadwinner role (Hunt and Hunt, 1982; Lein, 1983; Moen and Moorehouse, 1983; Piotrkowski, 1979; Pleck, 1983). Moen and Moorehouse (1983) attribute this increased attachment to a phenomenon known as the "life-cycle squeeze," the need of a family for more income at the very time when the wife is reducing her work commitment in order to care for small

children. It seems likely, then, that breadwinning responsibility is more likely to be shared at later stages of the family life cycle.

Stage in the family life cycle has a strong influence on a family's response to the problem of breadwinning in part because the presence of children increases the likelihood that either spouse will experience role overload (having more role demands than one can adequately fulfill). An employed mother of young children is likely to experience role overload in the form of competing work and family demands. It is important to realize, however, that such a woman has two possible responses available to her: She may cut back on her work responsibilities or she may define herself as a breadwinner and pressure her husband to increase his household commitments. Similarly, he can ease her role overload either by increasing his contribution to household labor and childcare or by increasing his wage earning so that she can reduce her commitment to market work.

How a wife balances the competing demands of home and work may be influenced by the extent to which her husband is suffering from role overload. Since husbands' level of household labor is generally quite low, regardless of their wives' labor force status (Berk, 1985; Pleck, 1985), role overload is most likely to occur for them primarily as a result of very long work hours -- caused, for example, by moonlighting or working overtime (Moen and Moorehouse, 1983). The only way a wife can relieve this stress is by assuming some of the responsibility

for breadwinning, and the only way a husband can seek relief is by relinquishing some of the breadwinning responsibility.

A family's response to role overload may be influenced by gender role ideology, but it will also depend on other situational factors, including total family income, the wife's labor force attachment, and the ratio of husband's to wife's wages. Even a couple who strongly value traditional roles may come to define the wife as a breadwinner if they believe that both incomes are necessary to maintain a minimally acceptable standard of living (Lein, 1983; Pleck, 1983). Thus, the women in Rosen's (1987) study who were most likely to describe their husbands as supportive of their employment were those whose husbands themselves earned low wages. Similarly, Hood (1983) found in her study of stay-at-home mothers who re-entered the labor force that it was the blue-collar men who were likely to grant their wives coprovider status.

Allocation of breadwinning responsibility to the wife also seems especially likely to occur if she has had few interruptions of her employment status and if she experiences her employment as stable and continuing. Haas (1982) found, for example, that role sharing wives had several years of work experience before marriage, and Hood (1983) found that wives were more likely to be defined as coproviders if they returned to work when their children were still young. Research also indicates that role sharing in general and sharing of the breadwinner role in particular are more likely to occur where the

ratio of husband's to wife's earnings is low (Hood, 1983; Model, 1982; Scanzoni, 1978). A wife who sees her income as essential to the family's support or who sees herself as just as capable as her husband of supporting the family may be more willing to assume breadwinning responsibility. We assume that both these conditions are more likely to hold when the differential between her income and her husband's is lower. Similarly, a husband who sees his wife's income as essential to family financial support and who experiences her work commitment as stable and continuing is more likely to have confidence in her breadwinning ability and may, therefore, be more willing to relinquish his own responsibility for breadwinning.

It is clear, then, that background characteristics and situational factors interact in complex ways as families respond to and redefine the traditional roles of breadwinner and homemaker. The discussion presented here is not intended to be an exhaustive inventory of factors which may affect the meaning of wives' labor force participation for dual-earner families, nor does it begin to examine the relative importance of those factors. What we are suggesting here is that the allocation of breadwinning responsibility in dual-earner families will be dependent not only on wives' labor force participation, but also on husbands' and wives' willingness to redefine the normative expectations of their traditional roles. In order for the breadwinner role to be shared, husbands must relinquish their traditional ownership of this role and wives must assume some of

the obliga ion. The extent to which they are willing to do so will depe d on a number of attitudinal and situational variables.

Conclusion

If we are to understand the meaning of wives' labor force participat on for dual-earner families and the consequences of that parti ipation, we must conceptualize the breadwinner role more clear y and use the concept more precisely. Researchers must aban on their assumption that all wives who are in the labor forc are breadwinners and, instead, treat the allocation of breadw nning responsibility in dual-earner families as a variable. Jane Hood (1986) has argued that this variable might turn out t be an important one in examining such issues as the division o household labor. Ferree's (1987) finding that the extent to which a wife is defined as a provider affects the likelihood that she will express dissatisfaction with her husband's ontribution to the housework lends support to Hood's claim.

We mu t look more closely at the breadwinner role not only as a var able that may improve our understanding of other phenomena n which we are interested, but also as a subject of study in s own right. Much work is needed before we will be able to a swer basic questions about the allocation of breadwinning r ponsibility in dual-earner families: To what extent has breadw nning responsibility been assigned to employed wives?

How much variation is there among dual-earner couples in the way breadwinning responsibility is allocated? What factors influence the extent to which the breadwinner role is shared? What is the relative importance of these various factors and how do they interact with one another? These questions can only be answered through carefully designed and conducted research, research which will greatly enhance our understanding of the meaning of labor force participation in married women's lives.

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